



A Critical Analysis of UNDP-Supported ‘ Social Innovation ’ Projects in Governance: Case Studies of Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia

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1. Rationale

This study aims at evaluation of UNDP-supported ‘social innovation’ projects launched in 2012-2013, and finding out their particular features, so as at discussion of the evolution of social innovation concept in the post-Soviet Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia. It focuses on ‘social innovation’ projects in governance that have been undertaken by three umbrella organizations, namely, the UNDP/UNV ‘Social Innovation and Volunteerism in Uzbekistan’ project (Uzbekistan), SocialBoost (Ukraine) and Kolba Lab (Armenia) with development assistance from United Nations Development Program (UNDP). This research contributes to knowledge on *social innovation* through the yet missing critical analysis of ‘social innovation’ projects in governance for development in the post-Soviet republics. Critical analysis of the ‘social innovation’ projects is achieved by applying social practice and human development theories.

The research takes note that to achieve its development goals, the UNDP adjusted the concept of ‘social innovation’ to the local context in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia, to achieve better political and economic opportunities, so as social services, and for improving capabilities of individuals. ‘Social innovation’ projects have been aimed for a greater inclusion, more participation and responsiveness through the extensive use of information and communication technology, open data, as well as locally-designed engineering works. Moreover, the UNDP put strong emphasis on the social impact of these post-Soviet ‘social innovation’ projects, particularly in terms of the identification of social challenges and the creation of new social relationships. Subsequently, ‘social innovation’ has evolved in post-Soviet settings, and created a new type – *developmental social innovation*.

Also, in the UNDP’s approach, ‘social innovation’ was seen as something that

can be aspired and worked for (something *volitional*), so that the UNDP referred to newly started projects as ‘social innovations’. This characteristic, in post-Soviet countries, turned all the common features of social innovation volitional. In this regard, ‘social innovation’ projects mainly achieved four common features of social innovation, namely, human-centeredness, networking, localness and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), but were still progressing towards two other features – scaling up and making a social impact.

The study shows that ‘social innovations’ in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia reached different levels of progress. In Uzbekistan ‘social innovation’ projects have not received government support, and occasionally cooperated with local organization. Therefore, they mostly affected individual needs, and occasionally fostered institutional changes. In Armenia and Ukraine better scaling possibilities were available, due to the better government support and a more active civil society. Thus, ‘social innovation’ projects in these countries demonstrate signs of moving towards social change, but it is yet premature to assess their social impact. Finally, the study notes that in post-Soviet republics the concept of social innovation was interchanged with other terms that might diminish the social innovation concept.

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Chapter previews

- *Chapter one* covers background information on ‘social innovation’ in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia. It presents research problem and research gaps, and formulates research questions as well as the argument. The chapter indicates the significance of the study within the existing scholarly work on social innovations. This chapter is also devoted to methodology and methods of the research. It includes detailed explanation of how the methodological matrix of the study was organized. In particular, it explains the use of theory and the literature for the data gathering and data analysis, as tools for critical analysis of ‘social innovation’ projects conducted by projects/organizations supported by the UNDP in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia. This chapter also explains how the data was collected and how it was analyzed and utilized throughout the research.
- *Chapter two* explores the current literature on social innovations. It provides historical overview of the literature on social innovations from different case studies. It demonstrates how differently the concept was understood and applied throughout the historical timeframe. Also, it critically discusses social sciences theories devoted to social innovations, namely, the ‘connected difference’ approach, structuration and structural function theories, actor-network theory, social practice theory. Moreover, it specifically focuses on and discusses the scholarly literature on diverse features and types of social innovations, so as on the literature on development and social

innovation. The chapter critically engages with theories, and selects social practice theory that will be applied to analyze and critically evaluate ‘social innovation’ projects in governance in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia. Finally, it points out the gaps in the research and literature on social innovations and discusses how it is going to fulfill these gaps.

- *Chapter three* focuses on the use of theory in the dissertation. It introduces the reader to various definitions of social innovation coming from different fields. The chapter clarifies how social practice theory have been adjusted and applied for the UNDP-supported ‘social innovation’ projects in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia. Additionally, it discusses human development theory and the UNDP’s perspective on governance for development, and developmental ‘social innovations’. Finally, the chapter discuss the theoretical framework of the dissertation encompassing features of social innovations from social practice theory, and developmental characteristic of it, inherited from human development theory.
- *Chapter four* starts from the discussion of the UNDP’s development work in developing countries to explain how development assistance was organized, and to provide the background information for the further discussion of how and why delivery of development assistance provided by the UNDP has changed in post-Soviet republics. To explain how exactly the UNDP’s development work has changed in light of shifting to social innovations, the chapter specifically examines volitional and developmental approach of the UNDP to ‘social innovation’ projects in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia.
- *Chapters five, six and seven* critically analyze ‘social innovation’ projects in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia. The chapters discuss the projects supported by the UNDP and the UNDP/UNV ‘Social Innovation and Volunteerism in Uzbekistan’ project, SocialBoost and Kolba Lab. They describe how ‘social innovation’ projects were generated in three post-Soviet republics. In the chapters, critical assessment of ‘social innovation’ projects against the common features of social innovation is conducted. The assessment helps to identify peculiarities of ‘social innovation’ projects in the post-Soviet context and examine how they have fared as social innovations. The chapters also explicitly discuss developmental feature of ‘social

innovation' projects in Uzbekistan that contributed to the emergence of the new developmental type of social innovation. This type is aimed at improvement of capabilities of individuals, more political and economic freedoms, enhancement of social standards, empowerment of citizens, more transparent and accountable governments. Finally, the chapters note and discuss how the social innovation concept was interchanged with other terms used by the national partners and leaders of 'social innovation' projects, and how this might diminish the social innovation concept.

- *Chapter eight* summarizes and analyses the results of the research, and discusses perspectives of social innovation in post-Soviet republics. It offers the summary of evaluation of 'social innovation' projects in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia by pointing out whether and how they fared as social innovations. The chapter also discusses how the social innovation concept evolved in post-Soviet republics, and what the peculiarities of this phenomenon in the post-Soviet developing countries are. Finally, this chapter concludes the PhD thesis. It highlights the main findings of the study and identifies potential topics for the further research.

3. Market for publishing the dissertation

The dissertation is intended for the development work professionals in the development agencies (e.g. UNDP), so as for the scholars and practitioners planning and implementing social innovations in developing (including post-Soviet) countries. So, I'm now discussing with Taylor & Francis and Baktria Press for publishing the dissertation into the book within 2020. The book potential can be used in the field of development studies, where social innovations are being recently applied.

The book potential would appeal, but not limit to the following academic journals, professional organizations and communities:

- European Public and Social Innovation Review Journal
<http://pub.sinnergiak.org/index.php/esir/index>
- Technical University Dortmund, Department of Social Research, Projects on Social Innovations (SI-Drive)
- http://www.sfs.tu-dortmund.de/cms/en/social_innovation/index.html

- The UNDP
www.undp.org
- Social Innovation Community
<https://www.facebook.com/SICommunityEU/>

The book will be also translated into Uzbek and Russian, and published in Uzbekistan for the distribution among the local civil society activists, non-governmental organizations, policy makers, USAID Project “Partnership for Innovations”, Ministry for Innovations Development etc. To reach the broadest possible audience, I intend to use a clear, simple and accessible writing style.

The study is distinctive from the previous researches on social innovations in developing and developed countries based on the following major points:

1. Although a huge amount of scholarly and policy oriented literature on social innovations (Buchegger et al., 2000; Gerometta et al., 2005; Hochgerner 2011; Evers et al., 2012; Bhatt 2013; Barraket 2015; Howaldt et al., 2015; Ionescu 2015; Oosterlynck et al., 2015; Bassi 2016; Domanski 2017; Marques et al., 2018; Howaldt et al., 2018, etc.) in developing and developed countries is produced, scholarly research analyzing ‘social innovation’ projects in post-Soviet republics has been hardly conducted.
2. Specific, not yet completed projects supported by the development agency (the UNDP) progressing towards being social innovations, have not been covered by the scholars
3. Scholarly literature has not yet analyzed how features of social innovation held in post-Soviet republics, what kind of peculiarities, gains and shortcomings they had in post-Soviet context.
4. Finally, it is still not clear how existing typologies would cover ‘social innovation’ projects in post-Soviet republics, and where these projects would fall.

Competition

4. Brief Curriculum Vitae

Attached

5. Length of script

The entire manuscript would probably have around 80.000 words (including references and footnotes). Supplementing the introduction, four chapters and conclusion, list of abbreviations, five figures, a bibliography, and nineteen tables.

Third party materials: Third party materials have not been used. The data is original and has been collected for the purpose of the study. All materials used for the book have not been yet planned for publications in other journals or with other publishers, therefore any arrangements regarding copyright issues are not required.

6. Anticipated delivery date of the finished script

Since this book is going to be produced based my PhD thesis, the major parts of the manuscript are already written. However, I would like to supplement the study with collected data representing local voices of those benefited from ‘social innovation’ projects in Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Armenia. This would require additional data collection from three case study countries. Thus, I anticipate complete additional data collection and submit the final manuscript by December 2020.

7. Suggestions for two possible referees

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